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(54) Title: MASSAGING DEVICE FOR INSERTION IN THE BACK OF MASSAGE CHAIRS OR THE LIKE			
(57) Abstract			
<p>A massaging device for insertion in the back of massage chairs or the like, comprising a frame which supports, so that they can rotate about their respective axes (2a, 3a), an upper shaft (2) and a lower shaft (3) having parallel and substantially horizontal axes and eccentric portions (4, 5, 6, 7; 106, 107). Two arms (8, 9) are provided, each arm supporting a massage wheel (10, 11) which can rotate about its own almost horizontal axis, and, proximate to one of its ends, the corresponding massage wheel (10, 11) and being connected, proximate to its opposite end, to an eccentric portion (4, 5) of the upper shaft (2) and, at an intermediate region, to an eccentric portion (6, 7; 106, 107) of the lower shaft (3). Elements are also provided for rotating the shafts (2, 3) about their respective axes (2a, 3a) to produce an alternating movement of the massage wheels (10, 11) in a substantially horizontal direction and in a substantially vertical direction, the actuation elements comprising an upper gearmotor (20) which actuates the upper shaft (2) and a lower gearmotor (21) which actuates the lower shaft (3).</p>			

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MASSAGING DEVICE FOR INSERTION IN THE BACK OF MASSAGE CHAIRS
OR THE LIKE

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a massaging device for insertion in the back of massage chairs or the like.

Background Art

Conventional massaging devices for insertion in the back of massage chairs or the like generally comprise a frame which supports, so that they can rotate about their respective axes, an upper shaft and a lower shaft which are arranged so that their axes are parallel and substantially horizontal. The upper shaft and the lower shaft have, at their two opposite longitudinal ends, eccentric portions having a circular cross-section and which can be likened to cranks, each portion rotatably engaging an arm which supports, at its opposite end, a wheel which can rotate freely about its own axis, which is usually slightly inclined with respect to a horizontal direction which is parallel to the axes of the upper and of the lower shafts.

Each one of the arms is pivoted, proximate to one of its intermediate portions, to an eccentric portion of the lower shaft which can also be likened to a crank.

Each one of the arms is connected to the eccentric portion of the lower shaft by a linkage. The linkage is articulated in an intermediate point so as to allow to vary its useful length and connect it to the corresponding eccentric portion of the lower shaft by means of a spherical joint.

The axis of the eccentric portions of the upper shaft which engage the arms is slightly inclined with respect to

the axis of the upper shaft. As a consequence of the geometry of the eccentric portions, the rotary actuation of the upper and of the lower shafts causes an oscillation of the wheels, which constitute the parts of the massaging device that act on the back of the user, about a respective axis which passes through the point where the axis of the corresponding eccentric portion of the upper shaft intersects the corresponding axis of the upper shaft; in other words, a movement in a horizontal direction occurs, thus producing the massage known as "stretching", and a vertical movement, producing the massage known as "tapping".

The rotary actuation of the upper and of the lower shafts about their respective axes is achieved by means of a single motor which, by means of a belt drive, turns a transmission shaft arranged transversely to the upper and to the lower shafts and connected thereto by means of two pairs of helical gears. The helical gears arranged on the transmission shaft are connected to the transmission shaft by unidirectional bearings, i.e., bearings which can only rotate in one direction, allowing the corresponding gear to rotate freely with respect to the transmission shaft, and which lock in the opposite direction, rigidly rotationally coupling the corresponding gear to the transmission shaft.

The bearing of one of the gears arranged on the transmission shaft rotates freely in one direction, whilst the bearing of the other gear arranged on the transmission shaft rotates freely in the opposite direction.

In this manner, by means of a single motor which is actuated once in one direction and once in the other direction, the upper and lower shafts are rotated

alternatively, the upper shaft producing the oscillating motion of the massage wheels, i.e., their movement in a substantially horizontal direction, the lower shaft moving the massage wheels substantially in a vertical direction.

5 This device has the drawback of being very noisy during operation.

Moreover, as a consequence of the alternating actuation of the upper and of the lower shafts, i.e., of a nonsimultaneous actuation of the two shafts, the two
10 stretching and tapping massage functions are performed separately.

Disclosure of the Invention

A principal aim of the present invention is to solve the above problems, providing a massaging device for insertion in the back of massage chairs or the like, which,
15 when required, allows to simultaneously achieve movement of the massage wheels in a substantially horizontal direction and in a substantially vertical direction, simultaneously achieving both stretching massage and tapping massage.

Within the scope of this aim, an object of the present
20 invention is to provide a massaging device which is very quiet during operation.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a massaging device which is practically maintenance-free.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a
25 massaging device wherein friction in the transmission of motion is minimized and which can use small and accordingly economical actuation motors.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a massaging device which can be manufactured with competitive

costs.

This aim, these objects, and others which will become apparent hereinafter are achieved by a massaging device for insertion in the back of massage chairs or the like, comprising: a frame which supports, so that they can rotate about their respective axes, an upper shaft and a lower shaft having parallel and substantially horizontal axes and eccentric portions; two arms, each whereof supports a massage wheel which can rotate about its own almost horizontal axis; each one of said arms supporting, proximate to one of its ends, the corresponding massage wheel and being connected, proximate to its opposite end, to an eccentric portion of said upper shaft and, at an intermediate region, to an eccentric portion of said lower shaft; means being provided for rotating said shafts about their respective axes for an alternating movement of said massage wheels in a substantially horizontal direction and in a substantially vertical direction, characterized in that said actuation means comprise an upper gearmotor which actuates said upper shaft and a lower gearmotor which actuates said lower shaft.

Brief description of the Drawings

Further characteristics and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of two preferred but not exclusive embodiments of the massaging device according to the invention, illustrated only by way of non-limitative example in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

figures 1 to 4 are views of the device according to the present invention in the first embodiment, and more

particularly:

figure 1 is a schematic front elevation view of the massaging device according to the present invention in an operating position, illustrating the movement of the massage 5 wheels in a predominantly vertical direction;

figure 2 is a schematic lateral elevation view of the device according to the present invention, in the operating position corresponding to the one shown in figure 1;

figure 3 is a schematic front elevation view of the 10 device according to the present invention in another operating position, illustrating the movement of the massage wheels in a predominantly horizontal direction;

figure 4 is a schematic lateral elevation view of the device according to the invention in the operating position 15 corresponding to the one shown in figure 2;

figures 5 to 8 illustrate the device according to the present invention according to a second embodiment, and more particularly:

figure 5 is a schematic front elevation view of the 20 massaging device according to the present invention;

figure 6 is a schematic front elevation view of the device according to the present invention in an operating position, illustrating the movement of the massage wheels in a predominantly horizontal direction;

25 figure 7 is a schematic front elevation view of the device according to the present invention in an operating position, illustrating the movement of the massage wheels in a predominantly vertical direction;

figure 8 is a schematic lateral elevation view of the 30 device according to the present invention, illustrating the

movement of the massage wheels in a predominantly vertical direction.

Ways of carrying out the Invention

With reference to the above figures, the device according to the present invention, generally designated by 5 the reference numerals 1 and 1a in its two illustrative embodiments, comprises in a per se known manner a frame, not shown for the sake of simplicity, which supports, so that they can rotate about their respective axes 2a and 3a, an upper shaft 2 and a lower shaft 3 which are substantially 10 parallel to each other and are arranged horizontally.

The upper shaft 2 has, at its longitudinal ends, two eccentric portions 4 and 5 which have a circular transverse cross-section and can in practice be likened to cranks.

Conveniently, the axes 4a and 5a of the eccentric 15 portions 4 and 5 are inclined with respect to the axis 2a of the upper shaft 2.

The eccentricity of the eccentric portions 4 and 5 is provided on a same side of the axis 2a of the upper shaft 2; i.e., the two eccentric portions 4 and 5 are in step with 20 respect to each other.

In the first embodiment, the lower shaft 3, too, has at its longitudinal ends two eccentric portions 6 and 7 which are also substantially circular and can be likened to two cranks.

25 Conveniently, the eccentricity of the eccentric portion 6 is opposite to the eccentricity of the eccentric portion 7; i.e., the two eccentric portions 6 and 7 are angularly offset with respect to each other about the axis 3a of the lower shaft 3 by an angle of 180°.

In the second embodiment, the two eccentric portions of the lower shaft, designated by the reference numerals 106 and 107, are constituted by two cams which are fixed to the lower shaft 3 proximate to its axial ends.

5 Each cam 106 and 107 is substantially elliptical in transverse cross-section and the two cams are mounted on the shaft so as to be angularly offset, about the axis 3a, by an angle of substantially 90°.

The device according to the present invention, in its
10 two embodiments, comprises two arms 8 and 9, each whereof rotatably supports a massage wheel 10 and 11 about its respective axis 10a and 11a.

The arms 8 and 9 support the corresponding massage wheel 10 and 11 so that it can rotate freely at one of their
15 ends and are pivoted, at their opposite end, to one of the eccentric portions 4 and 5 of the upper shaft 2.

Moreover, each arm 8 and 9 is connected, by means of an intermediate region of its extension, to one of the eccentric portions 6, 7, 106, 107 of the lower shaft 3.

20 Each one of the arms 8 and 9, in the two embodiments, is arranged on a plane which is substantially perpendicular to the axis 4a, 5a of the corresponding eccentric portion 4, 5 of the upper shaft 2 to which they are connected.

In the first embodiment, the connection of the
25 intermediate portion of each arm 8 and 9 to the corresponding eccentric portion 6 and 7 of the lower shaft 3 is provided by means of a linkage 12 and 13 which is pivoted, at one of its ends, to an intermediate portion of the corresponding arm 8 and 9 about an axis 14 and 15 which
30 is substantially parallel to the axis 10a, 11a of the

massage wheel 10, 11 which is supported by the arm 8, 9 and is connected to the eccentric portion 6 and 7 of the lower shaft 3 by means of a spherical joint 16, 17.

Each linkage 12, 13 is composed of two portions, 5 designated respectively by the reference numerals 12a, 12b, 13a, and 13b, which are pivoted to each other in an intermediate region of the linkage about an axis 18, 19 which is substantially perpendicular to the axis 14, 15 and so as to allow to vary the useful length of the linkage and 10 allow the oscillation of the arm 8, 9 produced by the inclination of the axis 4a, 5a with respect to the axis 2a of the upper shaft 2.

In the second embodiment, connection of the arms 8 and 9 to the lower shaft 3 is provided by cam followers, which 15 are fitted on the arms 8 and 9 and rest against the profile of the cams 106 and 107. More particularly, each one of two arms 8 and 9 supports, in an intermediate region of its extension, a cam follower constituted by a wheel 112, 113 resting on the corresponding cam 106, 107.

According to the invention, means are provided for 20 rotating the upper shaft 2 and the lower shaft 3 about their respective axes 2a, 3a; the actuation means are constituted by an upper gearmotor 20, which actuates the upper shaft 2, and by a lower gearmotor 21, which actuates the lower shaft 25 3.

More particularly, each gearmotor 20, 21 is constituted by an electric motor 22, 23 and by a reduction unit 24, 25 of the worm screw-helical gear type, wherein the worm screw is connected to the output shaft of the corresponding 30 electric motor 22, 23 and the helical gear is keyed on an

intermediate portion of the upper shaft 2 and of the lower shaft 3 respectively.

In this manner, the parts required to transmit motion from the motors 22, 23 to the shafts 2 and 3 are reduced to 5 a minimum, achieving particularly quiet operation.

The two motors 20, 21 can also be actuated simultaneously or alternately according to massage requirements.

For the sake of completeness in description, it should 10 be noted that in the second embodiment of the device the contact of the wheels 112, 113 with the cams 106, 107 is ensured in any condition by springs 114 which are stretched between the arms 8, 9 and the body of the motor 22 or another fixed locator element.

15 Operation of the massaging device according to the present invention is as follows.

By actuating the upper gearmotor 20, the upper shaft 2 is rotated about its own axis 2a. As a consequence of this rotation and of the eccentricity of the portions 4 and 5, 20 the arms 8 and 9 and the massage wheels 10 and 11 are actuated mainly with an oscillating motion about an axis passing through the intersection between the axis 4a, 5a of the corresponding eccentric portion 4, 5 and the axis 2a, producing for the massage wheels 10 and 11 a predominantly 25 horizontal motion, as shown in particular in figures 3, 4, and 6, and performing the massage known as "stretching".

It should be noted that the horizontal oscillating motion of the massage wheels 10 and 11 is allowed by the articulation of the linkages 12 and 13 about the axes 18, 19 30 for the device according to the first embodiment and by the

simple contact connection provided between the arms 7 and 8 and the cams 106 and 107 for the device in its second embodiment.

The actuation of the lower gearmotor 21 causes the 5 rotation of the lower shaft 3 about its own axis. As a consequence of this rotation and of the presence of the eccentric portions 6, 7 and 106, 107, which, by means of the linkages 12, 13 or the cam followers 112, 113, are connected to the arms 8 and 9, the massage wheels 10 and 11 move 10 predominantly in a vertical direction, as shown in particular in figures 1, 2, 7, and 8, providing so-called "tapping" massage.

The angular offset of the eccentric portions 6, 7, 106 and 107 causes the wheel 11 to move downwards as the wheel 15 10 rises, and viceversa.

Moreover, the particular elliptical configuration of the cams 106 and 107 of the device in its second embodiment allows, at each turn of the lower shaft 3, two cycles of motion of the wheels 10 and 11 in a predominantly vertical 20 direction, thus achieving the further advantage of being able to actuate the motor 23 at a lower speed.

It should be noted that the motors 22 and 23, as mentioned, can be actuated simultaneously, so as to effectively perform at the same time the two stretching and 25 tapping massage functions.

In practice it has been observed that the device according to the present invention fully achieves the intended aim and objects, since it is capable of simultaneously performing the two massages, namely 30 stretching and tapping, also ensuring particularly quiet

operation.

A further advantage is that it is possible to use motors having lower power ratings, with a consequent reduction in production costs.

5 The massaging device thus conceived is susceptible of numerous modifications and variations, all of which are within the scope of the inventive concept; all the details may also be replaced with other technically equivalent elements.

10 In practice, the materials employed, as well as the dimensions, may be any according to requirements and to the state of the art.

CLAIMS

1 1. A massaging device for insertion in the back of
2 massage chairs or the like, comprising: a frame which
3 supports, so that they can rotate about their respective
4 axes, an upper shaft and a lower shaft having parallel and
5 substantially horizontal axes and eccentric portions; two
6 arms, each whereof supports a massage wheel which can rotate
7 about its own almost horizontal axis; each arm supporting,
8 proximate to one of its ends, the corresponding massage
9 wheel and being connected, proximate to its opposite end, to
10 an eccentric portion of said upper shaft and, at an
11 intermediate region, to an eccentric portion of said lower
12 shaft; means being provided for rotating said shafts about
13 their respective axes for an alternating movement of said
14 massage wheels in a substantially horizontal direction and
15 in a substantially vertical direction, characterized in that
16 said actuation means comprise an upper gearmotor which
17 actuates said upper shaft and a lower gearmotor which
18 actuates said lower shaft.

1 2. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 said upper and said lower gearmotors are constituted by an
3 electric motor and by a reduction unit with a worm screw
4 which is connected to the shaft of the electric motor and a
5 helical gear which meshes with said worm screw and is keyed
6 respectively to an intermediate portion of said upper shaft
7 and to an intermediate portion of said lower shaft.

1 3. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 said eccentric portions of the upper shaft have, in a
3 transverse cross-section, a circular shape in which the

4 center is spaced with respect to the axis of the upper
5 shaft.

1 4. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 said eccentric portions of the upper shaft have an axis
3 which is spaced from the axis of the upper shaft and is
4 inclined with respect to the axis of the upper shaft.

1 5. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 the axes of said eccentric portions of the upper shaft are
3 spaced on the same side with respect to the axis of said
4 upper shaft.

1 6. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 the eccentric portions of the lower shaft have, in a
3 transverse cross-section, a circular shape wherein the
4 center is spaced with respect to the axis of the upper
5 shaft.

1 7. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 the axes of the eccentric portions of the lower shaft are
3 spaced on opposite sides with respect to the axis of said
4 lower shaft, with a mutual angular offset of substantially
5 180° about the axis of said upper shaft.

1 8. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 each one of said arms is connected to an eccentric portion
3 of said lower shaft by a linkage which is pivoted to the
4 corresponding arm with one of its ends about an axis which
5 is substantially parallel to the axis of the corresponding
6 massage wheel, said linkage being connected to said
7 eccentric portion of the lower shaft by means of a spherical
8 joint and being composed of two portions which are
9 articulated to each other, in an intermediate region of the
10 extension of said linkage, about an axis which is

11 substantially perpendicular to the pivoting axis of said
12 linkage to said arm, so as to vary the useful length of the
13 linkage and allow the lateral oscillation of the
14 corresponding arm and of the corresponding massage wheel
15 about an axis passing through the intersection between the
16 axis of the corresponding eccentric portion of the upper
17 shaft and the axis of said upper shaft.

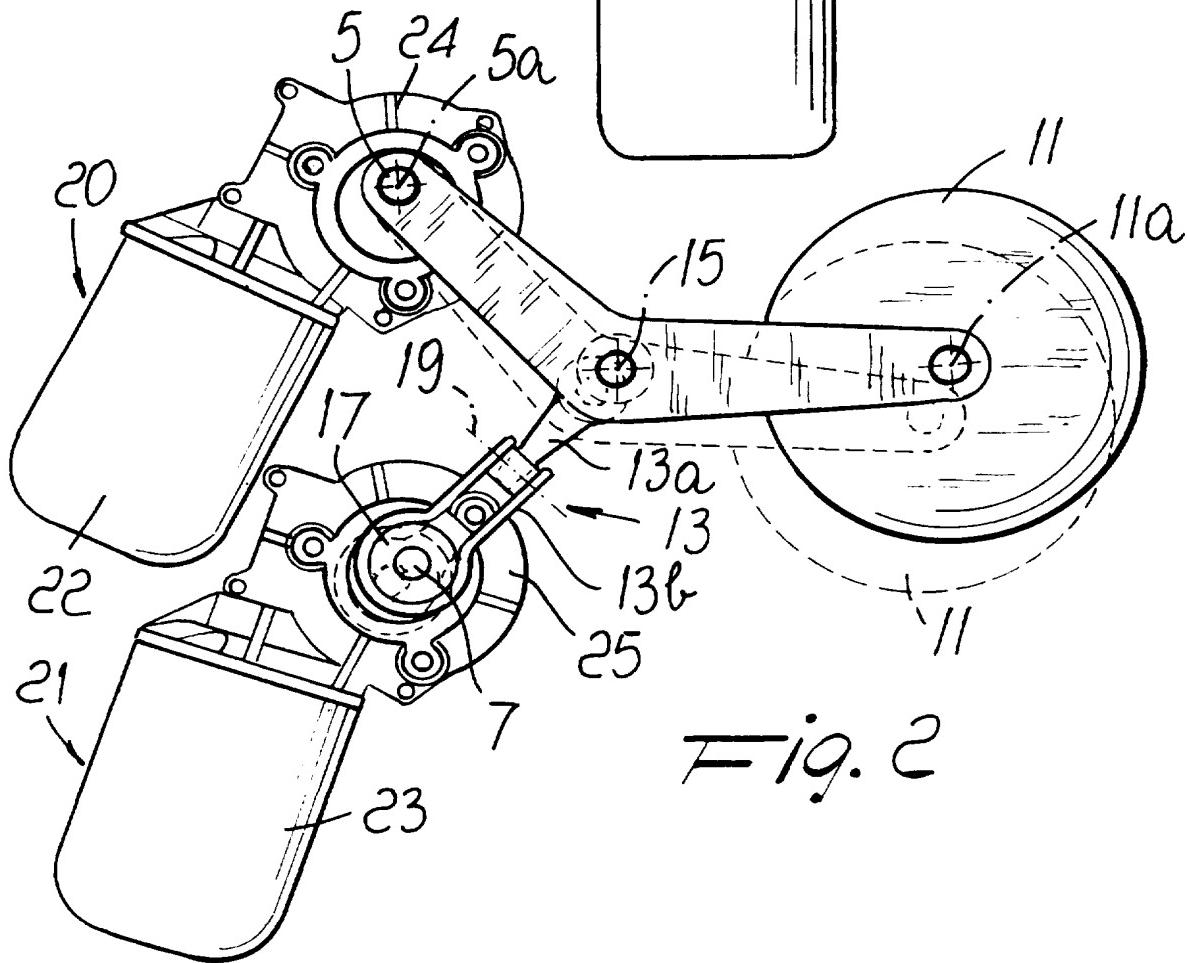
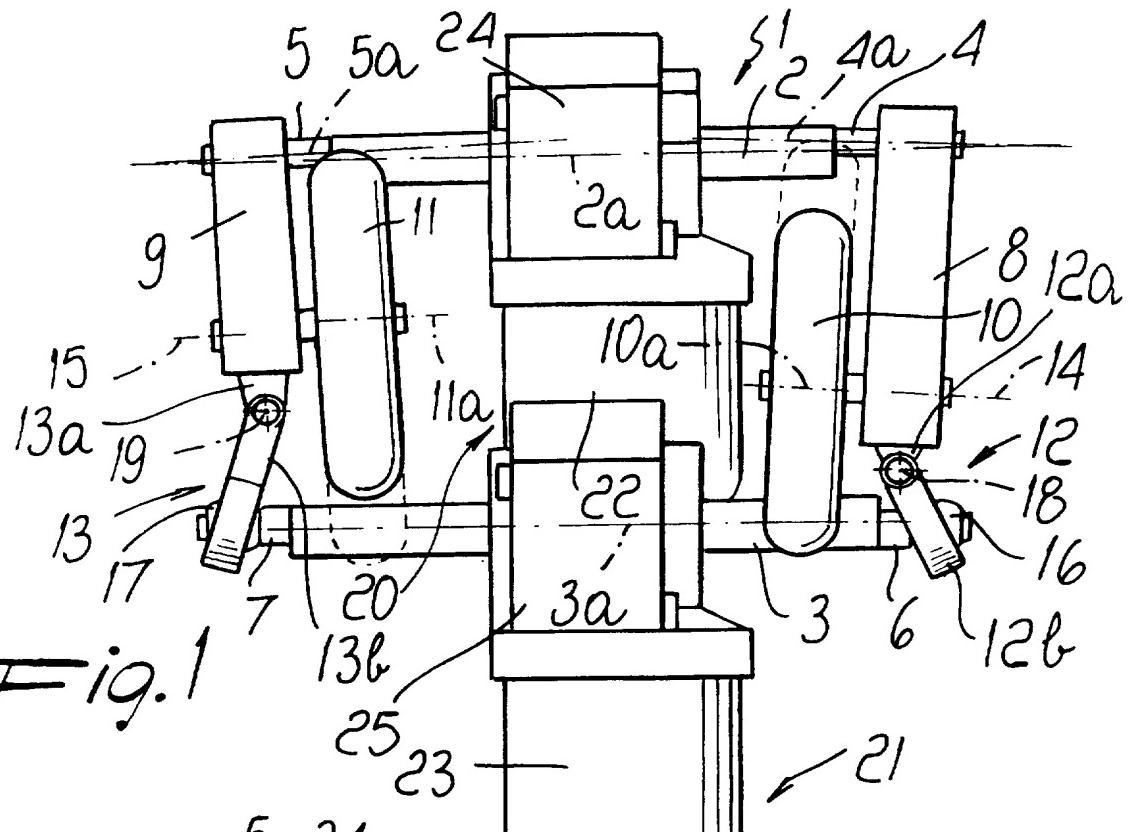
1 9. A device according to claim 1, characterized in that
2 said eccentric portions of said lower shaft are constituted
3 by cams connected to said lower shaft and engaged by a cam
4 follower which is connected to the corresponding arm of said
5 pair of arms.

1 10. A device according to claim 9, characterized in
2 that said cams are substantially elliptical in a transverse
3 cross-section.

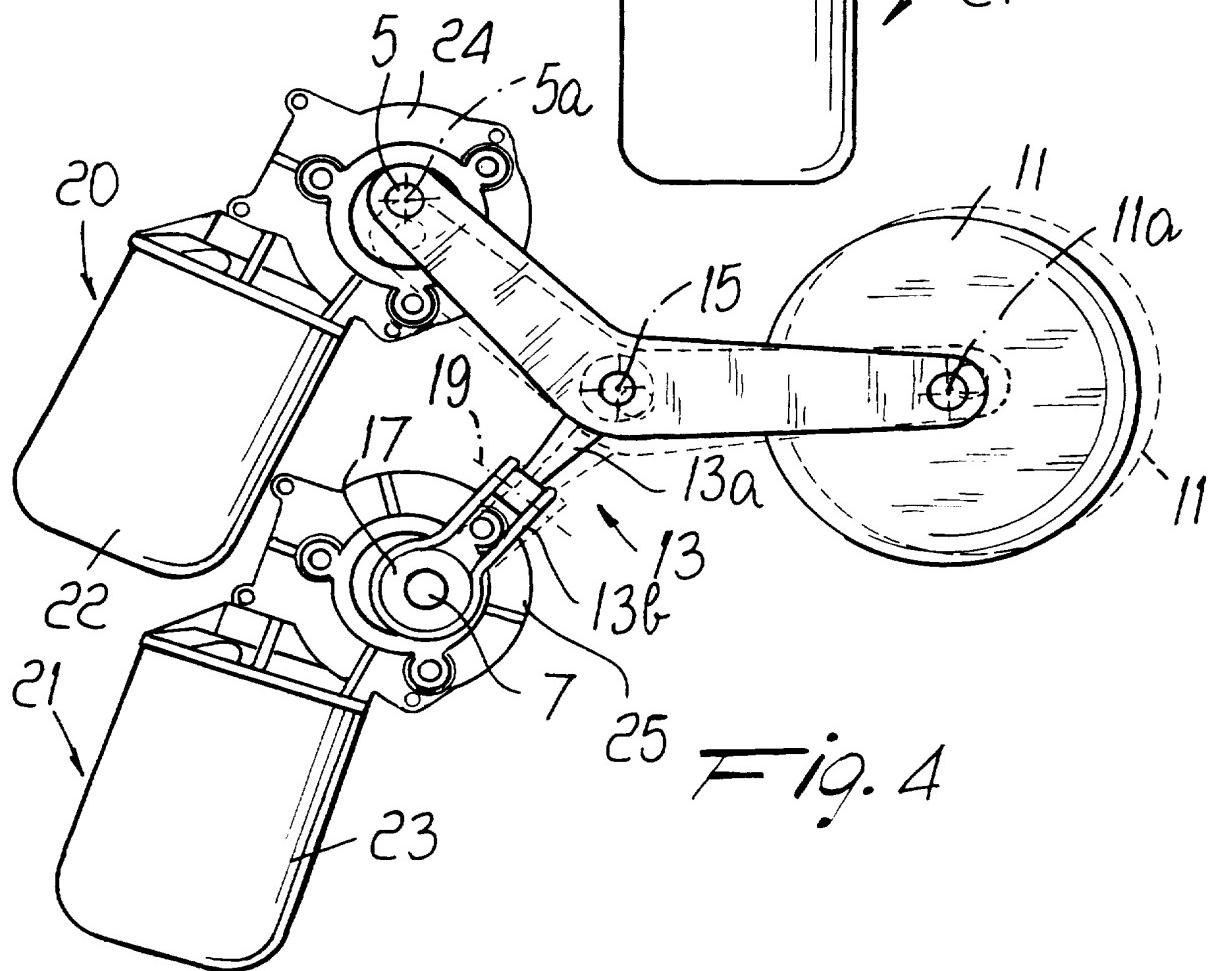
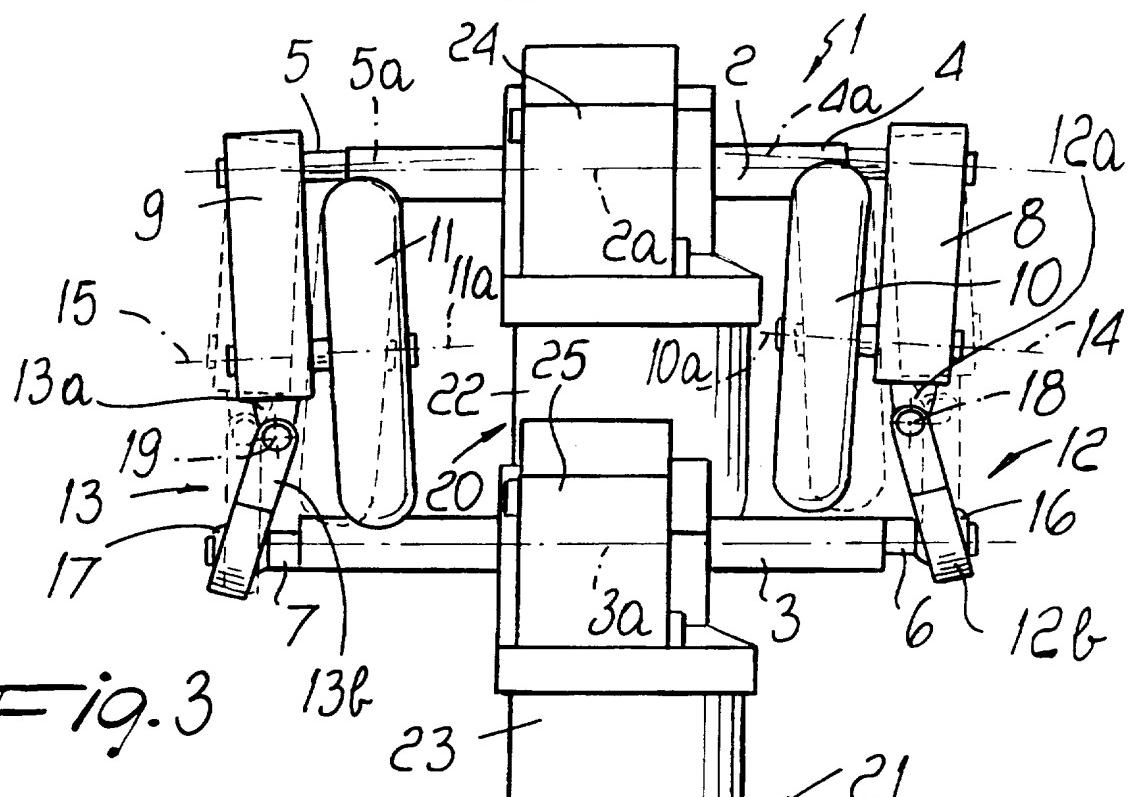
1 11. A device according to claim 9, characterized in
2 that said cams are mutually angularly offset about the axis
3 of said lower shaft by angle of substantially 90°.

1 12. A device according to claim 9, characterized in
2 that said cam follower is constituted by a wheel supported
3 by the corresponding arm of said pair of arms and resting on
4 the corresponding cam of said lower shaft.

1 13. A device according to claim 1, characterized in
2 that said eccentric portions of the upper and lower shafts
3 are formed at the longitudinal ends of said upper and lower
4 shafts.



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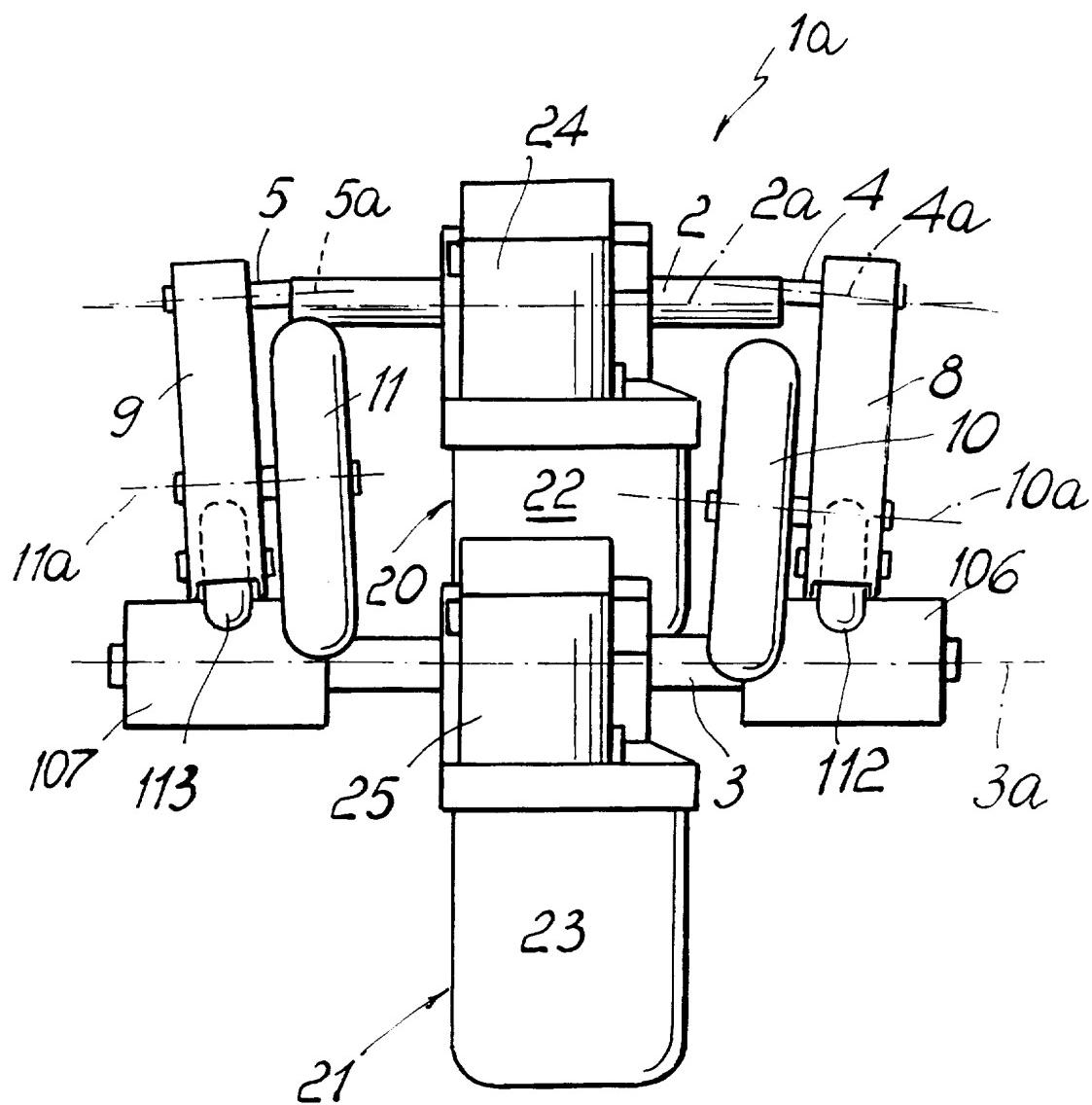
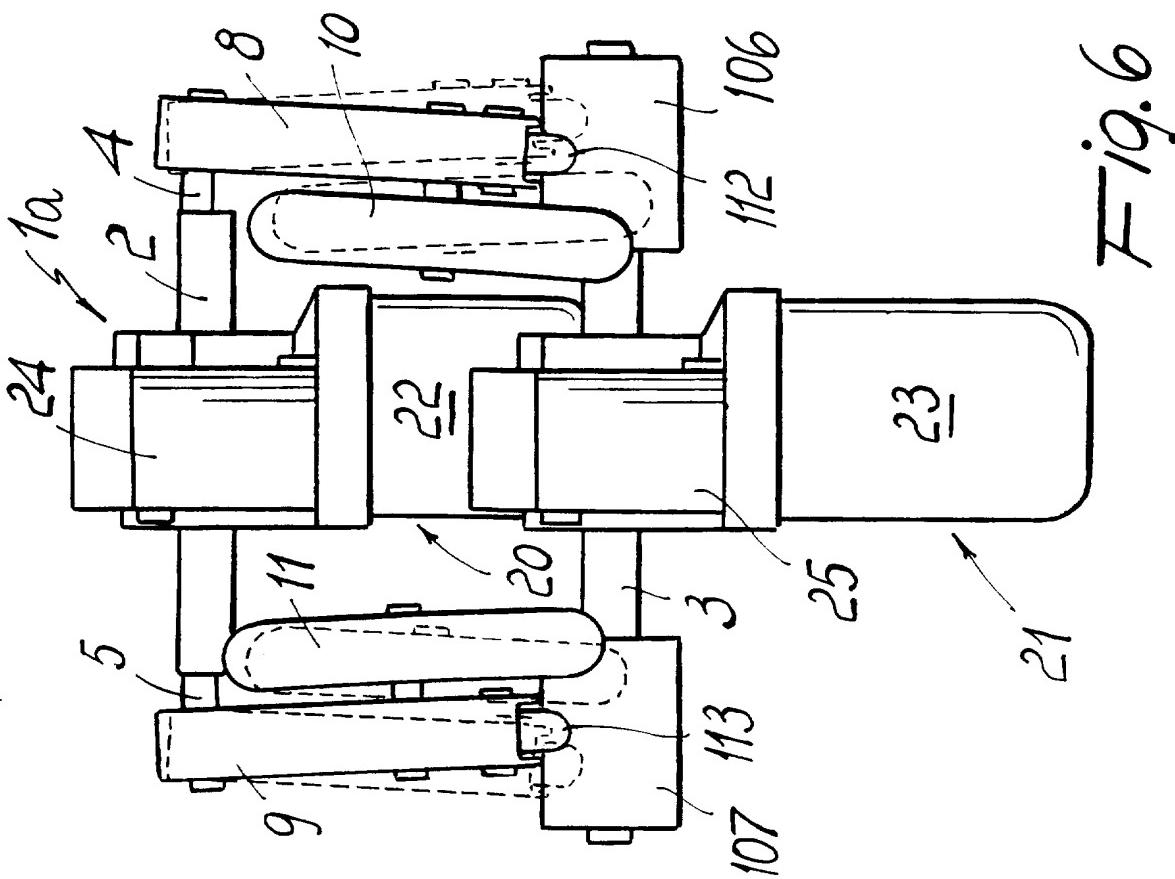
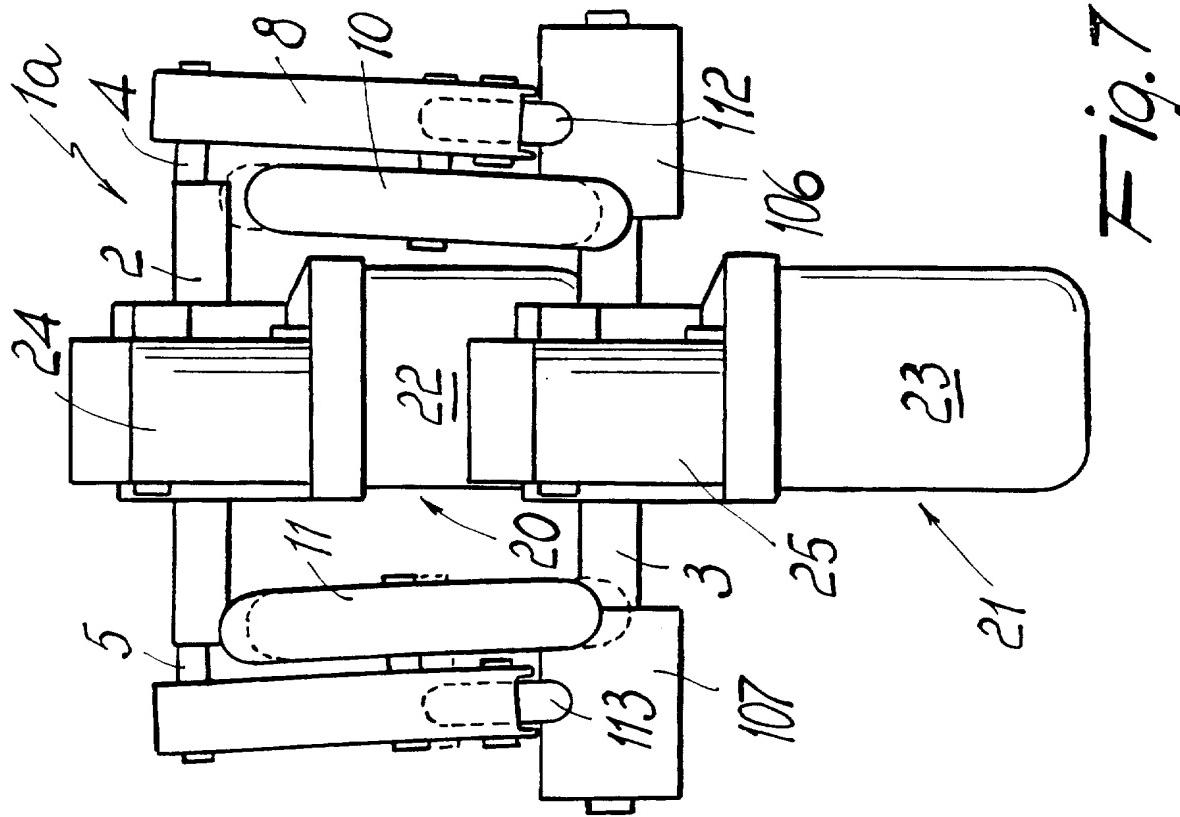


Fig. 5



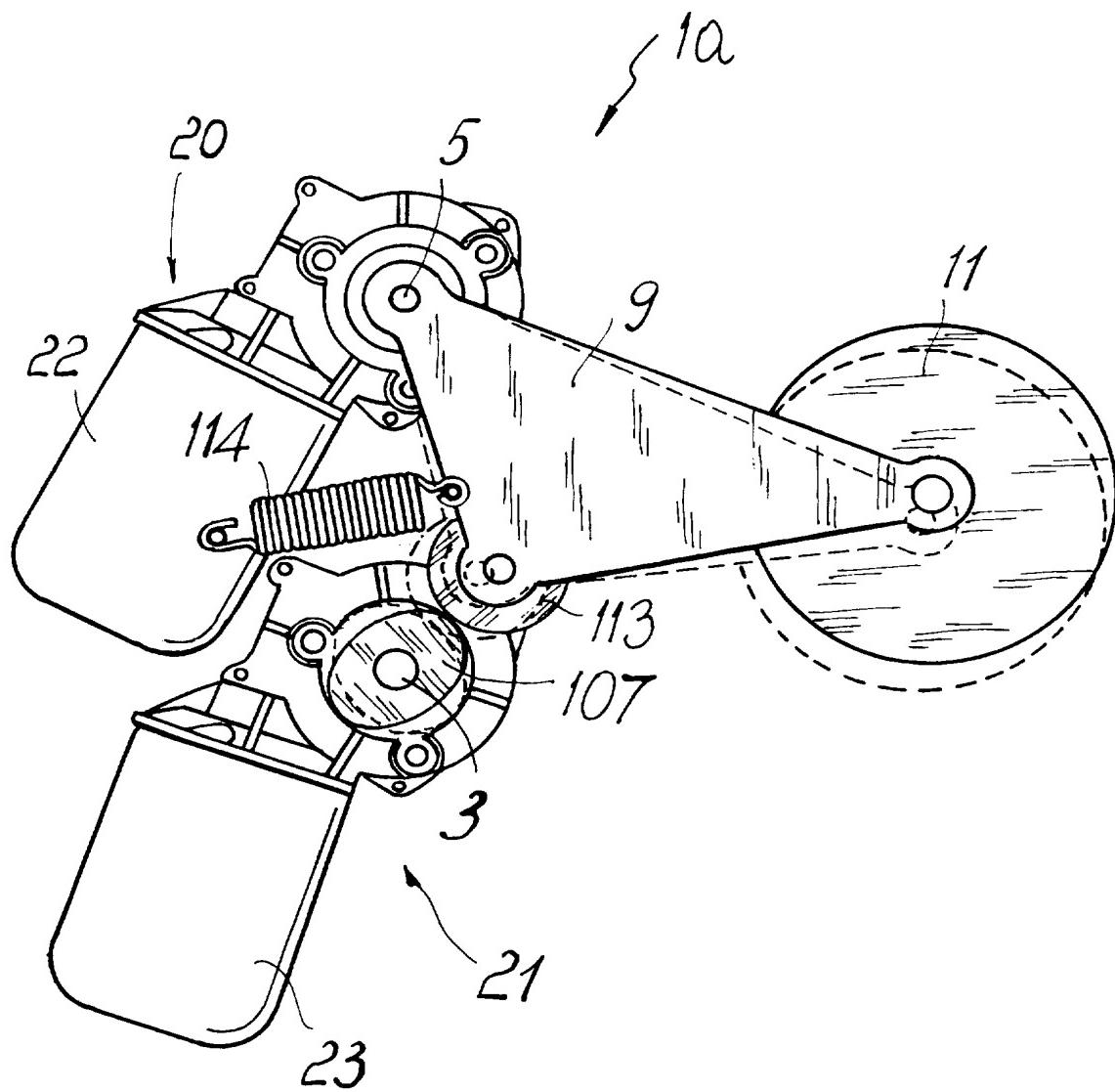


Fig. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Internat'l Application No
PCT/EP 97/01592

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 A61H15/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 A61H

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	GB 1 400 473 A (INADA) 9 July 1975	1,6,7,13
Y	see page 2, line 42 - page 3, line 38; figures ---	2-5
Y	US 4 718 408 A (BARREIRO) 12 January 1988 see column 2, line 17 - column 3, line 33; figures ---	2-4
Y	US 5 052 376 A (YAMASAKI) 1 October 1991 see column 4, line 56 - line 63; figure 3 ---	5
A	US 5 464 382 A (WANG) 7 November 1995 see abstract; figures ---	1-7,13
A	WO 92 17141 A (BARREIRO) 15 October 1992 see abstract; figures -----	1-7,13

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Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
10 July 1997	25.07.97
Name and mailing address of the ISA European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+ 31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax (+ 31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Jones, T

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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